LIFE project report

## Project name (as stated on LIFE website): Social Media Potential For Building Meaningful Connections

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## 1. Introduction to the topic

Although many social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tinder, etc.) are efficient for reaching a large audience, they are not specifically designed for creating long-lasting and meaningful friendships and relationships.

That is why this project has two primary goals:

* Explaining how to create meaningful connections online, figuring out the elements that determine emotional connection and mutual attraction;
* Envisioning a new social media platform/application that would facilitate the formation of meaningful relationships.

## 2. The importance of the problem & chosen methods

The experiences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic - isolation, social distancing, masking – have contributed to another rapidly spreading problem: loneliness. According to the data of the European Commission, around 7% of people in EU (roughly 30 million people) report being frequently lonely, 18% (roughly 75 million people) report being socially isolated. It is hard to underestimate the impact of these factors on the well-being of individuals, since they are associated with increased rates of social anxiety, depression and suicide.

Online environment seems to provide a solution, but superficial contacts won't help: there is a need for a contact that is more profound and «deep». So what can help establish a meaningful connection online? To answer this question we have conducted 17 semi-structured in-depth interviews with people who met and maintained their relationships online and have collected theoretical material to support certain findings pertinent to online-formed friendships and relationships. Based on these results we developed ideas of new social media platforms that aim at creating meaningful connections between people.

## 3. Activities & stakeholders

Our project team consisted of two sub-teams, six people each, with two people gathering theoretical information and writing an overview, and ten people conducting in-depth interviews.

The activities of our team members included, but were not limited to:

* attending weekly meetings to update our supervisor on our progress and receive feedback;
* preparing questions for the interview;
* interviewing friends and couples who have met online and managed to establish a high-quality, long-lasting relationships;
* identifying crucial factors that contributed to the formation of the relationship and, later on, its maintenance;
* mapping out various solutions that have contributed to the creation of meaningful connections online;
* developing hypotheses on social media potential for building meaningful connections that could be tested through an online survey;
* participating in a master-class on a method of generating creative ideas;
* developing social media platform ideas that aim at creating meaningful connections between people;
* writing an article with the summary of our project.

This project studies how individuals create meaningful connections online, whether these connections are romantic or platonic. By conducting interviews with closest friends and romantic partners who met each other online, we have received vital information on friendship/relationship formation, the building of emotional connection, and relationship maintenance. This project can impact millions of people (see statistics in p. 2) who might be likely to build relationships online. The project impacts app developers as well, in giving insights into the users of social media and suggestions for potential improvements.

## 4. Sustainability

Sustainability of the project is ensured through the professional and academic interest of the stakeholders, students and supervisor. Many of them are connected to the topic in their professional life and can use the outcomes of this project in their work or academic projects.

## 5. Project results & annexes

## We have come up with several ideas for social media platforms and illustrated our ideas with a series of app mockups. Once implemented, we believe our findings can have a beneficial impact on society.

## **Annexes**:

* Theoretical overview
* Social media ideas
* Mockups of social media apps: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1aEQ7yR-zu8ePjfbMpTdg0gBw4yip\_paI?usp=sharing
* Action plan
* Public Self-reflection
* Blog post: https://medium.com/innovation/social-media-potential-for-building-meaningful-connections-235afbedf53e